

BLACK AMERICA: FROM NADIR THROUGH THE GREAT DEPRESSION

HIST 347 • Spring 2018

Instructor

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Office Hours: Mondays 1:15 p.m. until 2:15 p.m. (and also by appointment), and via

Remind Mon.-Sat., 9:00 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Meetings

Except for university holidays and other occasions either noted on the syllabus or announced in class, the course meets Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 11:00 a.m. until 11:50 a.m. in Humanities 328.

Course Description and Objectives

Consider this particular view of the rise and articulation of a racial caste system in American life: In 1872, there were more than 300 southern black legislators in the U.S. Congress and in state houses across the former confederacy; by 1880 there were less than 100; by 1900 the number approached zero.

In American history, not without dissonance, the age in which this disaster unfolded is known more generally as the Progressive Era. Historian Rayford Logan—clearly more focused on the racialized political catastrophe at hand and on the social and cultural backlash surrounding it—described the era, conversely, as [*The Betrayal of the Negro*](#) and [*the nadir*](#) of African American life in the United States. Starting in the kinds of wreckage epitomized by the evisceration of black citizenship rights but also gazing beyond, historian Leslie Brown and others have noted that this period of black disenfranchisement and oppression was also a *zenith* of African American institutional and community life. The era that marked the height of extrajudicial violence against American blacks was also a high water mark in the development of the black press. The moment in American culture in which the popular image of the black was the *most* degraded, also saw the maturation of an expressly antidotal black women's club movement. The foundational years that ensured American social science was shot through with a virulent and fundamental racism was also the age that laid the foundations of a powerfully antiracist African American studies. The period which witnessed the perfection of American segregation was also a seedbed for the ideas, tactics, and strategies that would later give birth to a second American Reconstruction.

HIST 347 is a course about this cacophonous and contradictory era. It is, in this sense, about the smaller instances that gave shape and form to the larger period—the Colfax



Figure 1: Early faculty members at Palmer Memorial Institute (Guilford County, NC). Who was Charlotte Hawkins Brown?

massacre, the Slaughterhouse cases, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the founding of the NACW, Booker T. Washington's dinner with Theodore Roosevelt, the Philippine-American war, Marcus Mosiah Garvey's arrival in the United States, the American occupation of Haiti, Laura Wheeling Waring's "Anne Washington Derry," the boll weevil, the reach of the *Chicago Defender*, the NAACP's Silent Protest Parade, the Scottsboro Boys, et cetera. In addition to dwelling on the interpretive significance and power of events such as these, the course will also focus on themes that both join and distinguish the era from others before and after—family, protest, infrapolitics, education, violence, war, class, religion, gender, recreation, community, diaspora, et cetera.

In these senses, the course is like most history classes in its attention to periodization: For us, one of our aims is to come to terms with the boundaries of the Jim Crow era in African American history, and to grasp how the actions and reactions of human actors actually defined the age. By the end of the course, then, students will have a firm handle on the kinds of bias, discrimination, violence, and segregation that came to define American life during the period. They will also possess a clear and mature view of the changing and sometimes distinct ways that African Americans experienced, mitigated, acquiesced to, and confronted caste. The course makes extended use of case studies as a way of coming to terms with the nature and substance of black life during the period, so students will also get substantial practice appraising this form of historical study. On the way to these ways of comprehending the subject, students will exercise their abilities to analyze change and continuity over time and space, to probe cause and effect, to wrestle with the complexities of historical contingency, and to consider the not always straight forward relationship between the past and the present. If you have taken a history course before, none of this will be completely new (though the subject matter, this particular slice of African American history, might be).

In addition to these important general objectives, the course will pay particular attention to a critical aspect of historical research, analysis, and writing: the interpretation and contextualization of primary sources.

Assessments and Assignments

In the main, assignments for the course focus on developing students' abilities in working with primary sources. For the final project, students will read a year or more of an African American periodical situated in our era of study, and from primary-source evidence garnered from that work compose a research paper of 6-8 pages examining a prominent question that is explicit or emergent in the semester's readings and discussions. In the run up to that project, students will also write a set of successive source essays. In these 2-3 page papers, students will very briefly bring a small number of primary sources from their on-going



Figure 2: Historian Leslie Brown. What major oral history project did Dr. Brown co-direct?



Figure 3: Historian Rayford Logan. How many articles did Dr. Logan publish in the *Journal of Negro History*?

periodical research to bear on an issue or set of issues that is particularly pertinent to each of the course's monographs.

The final grade for students enrolled in the class will be based on the following:

5%—performance on an initial interest essay (2-3 pages)

50%—performance on five short source essays (2-3 pages in length)

15%—contribution to creating and sustaining a vibrant intellectual community within the class through attentive listening, thoughtful conversation, and other means that promote comity and contribute to learning (quizzes to check reading, announced and otherwise, may also figure into this portion of the grade)

30%—performance on an end-of-course research project (6–8 pages in length)

Further details concerning the assignments are available on Canvas. Students who do not complete all assignments will receive a failing grade in the course. Work up to two days late is happily accepted (but will be graded without comment). Work submitted more than two days past the due date will receive a grade of 50% (also without comment). These two dispensations do not apply to the end-of-course research project (which must be turned in by the due date).

The due dates for class assignments are as follows: Initial Essay, Jan. 17; Short Essay One, Jan. 29; Short Essay Two, Feb. 19; Short Essay Three, Mar. 5; Short Essay Four, Apr. 2; Short Essay Five, Apr. 20; Final Project, May 2.

Attendance and Communication

As this is a history course built largely around lecture and discussion, your attendance is critically important to all of us in our striving to meet the stated course objectives. If you are not here, you cannot easily get the information presented in lecture, nor can you contribute to the building of the kind of intellectual community—through discussion, questioning, and debate—that is vital to the work of an upper-level history class. You may have different and perfectly legitimate ideas about the relationship between class attendance and learning. Perhaps we can talk about them over lunch sometime. In the meantime, the following policy is in place for the course (and it represents something of a compromise between various positions on the importance of course attendance): Students who miss more than three days of class will be penalized 1/3 of a grade point on their final grade for each day missed after the third. In general, written documentation from a physician or university official is required to excuse an absence. Please note, however, that such documentation will not be automatically accepted (acceptance, rather, is at the discretion of the instructor).

Exams, essay questions, et cetera will be uploaded to Canvas. So it is important for you to check that site frequently. Brief



Figure 4: Mamie Westmoreland, school teacher, 1900. What can you tell me about the Negro Exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition?

communications concerning the course (reminders, change of venue, et cetera) will be sent via [Remind](#) (which you can set to receive class messages via your preferred email address, via text message, or through an app for your phone). You can find the Remind instructions by [following this link](#).

Books and Readings

The books listed below form the course's core reading. Please obtain copies from the university bookstore or from your retailer of choice. Copies are also on reserve at Fondren library.

Boyle, Kevin. *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age*. Holt Paperbacks, 2005.

Brown, Leslie. *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

Chatelain, Marcia. *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration*. Duke University Press Books, 2015.

Haley, Sarah. *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

Rosengarten, Theodore. *All God's Dangers*. Vintage, 1989.



Figure 5: Houston Press Front Page Following the Camp Logan Riot. Where in Houston was Camp Logan?

Some Critical Information

Disability Support Services

Students with a documented disability and in need of academic or other adjustments should speak with me during the first two weeks of class (all communication will remain confidential). Students with disabilities should also contact the office of Disabled Student Services in Allen Center room 111 (phone 737-5841, e-mail adarice@rice.edu).

Rice University Honor Code

I expect that members of the course will re-familiarize themselves with the responsibilities and privileges of the [university's honor system](#). I expect that members of the course will assiduously follow the dictates of the honor system. I expect that members of the course will raise with me any questions concerning how the system applies to their work in the class. The pledge is required on all written work submitted in the course.

Wellness

Take care of yourself. As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may diminish your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Mental health services are available on campus, and treatment does work: <https://wellbeing.rice.edu/counseling-center/contact-us>.

Support is always available (24/7) from the Rice Counseling Center: (713) 348-3311. If you have a concern about yourself or a classmate [Talk to Someone](#).

Course Calendar

The course schedule is given below. All reading assignments should be completed by the end of the week indicated.

Jim Crow: A Still Warm Body

Week ending Jan. 12: Du Bois, "[The Forethought](#)," "[Of Our Spiritual Strivings](#)," and "[Of Alexander Crummell](#)"

The Aftermath of Emancipation: Caste, Community, the New Negro, and the Foundations of Modern America

Week ending Jan. 19: *No Mercy Here*, Introduction and chs. 1-3

Week ending Jan. 26: *No Mercy Here*, chs. 4-5, and Conclusion

Within, Against, and Beyond Caste: Views from the Jim Crow North

Week ending Feb. 2: *Arc of Justice*, Prologue, chs. 1-3

Week ending Feb. 9: *Arc of Justice*, chs. 4-7

Week ending Feb. 16: *Arc of Justice*, chs. 8-10, and Epilogue

Week ending Feb. 23: *South Side Girls*, Introduction, chs. 1-2

Week ending Mar. 2: *South Side Girls*, Introduction, chs. 3-4, and Conclusion

Within, Against, and Beyond Caste: Views from the Jim Crow South

Week ending Mar 9: *All God's Dangers*, 1-177

Week ending Mar. 23: *All God's Dangers*, 177-398

Week ending Mar. 30: *All God's Dangers*, 398-556

Week ending Apr. 6: *Upbuilding Black Durham*, Introduction, chs. 1-3

Week ending Apr. 13: *Upbuilding Black Durham*, chs. 4-6

Week ending Apr. 20: *Upbuilding Black Durham*, chs. 7-9, and Conclusion



Figure 6: A Southern chain gang, circa 1906. Library of Congress LC-D4-16155. What replaced slavery?

Changes

The syllabus may change. Changes to the syllabus will be announced in class and posted on the relevant section of Canvas.